

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 12027

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SUBJ: CHAOTIC LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION ADJOURNS FOR ONE MONTH

1. THE LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION OPENED ON DEC 12 AND, AFTER TWO DAYS OF CONFLICT, ADJOURNED UNTIL JAN 16. THE STICKING POINT WAS A DISAGREEMENT AMONG SUPPORTERS OF AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES JULIO CESAR TURBAY ON THE PROPOSED THIRD MEMBER OF THE PARTY'S NATIONAL DIRECTORATE (DNL).

2. A CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MADE UP OF SUPPORTERS OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ (THE SO-CALLED FIRST FORCE) AND TURBAYISTAS EASILY AGREED ON TWO MEMBERS-CURRENT MEMBER GUSTAVO BALCAZAR (TURBAY-ISTA) AND LUIS VILLAR BORDA (LOPISTA). AFTER THE COMMITTEE APPEARED NEAR AGREEMENT ON THE THIRD MEMBER, SEVERAL TURBAY-ISTAS PROTESTED AND BACKED THE YOUNG AND CONTROVERSIAL ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO BOTERO (CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES PRESIDENT AND ALSO CURRENT MEMBER OF THE DNL). TO COUNTER THIS MOVE THE COMMITTEE PROMOTED PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR JAIME CASTRO AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE. SANTOFIMIO, MEANWHILE, REFUSED REQUESTS THAT HE WITHDRAW HIS NAME, STATING THAT IT WAS UP TO THE CONVENTION TO DECIDE HIS FATE. APPARENTLY REALIZING THAT HE WOULD BE INVOLVED IN A DISPUTE, CASTRO ANNOUNCED HE WAS NOT A CANDIDATE, THEREBY CONFUSING EVERYONE.

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3. THE FIRST FORCE, CHARGING THE TURBAYISTAS WITH VIOLATING THE AGREEMENT PROVIDING FOR THE COMMITTEE TO DECIDE ON DNL MEMBERS, WITHDREW FROM THE CONVENTION, FORCING POSTPONEMENT OF FURTHER DELIBERATIONS UNTIL JANUARY 16. THE FIRST FORCE HAS STATED IT WILL RETURN TO THE CONVENTION IN JANUARY ONLY IF "CONDITIONS EXSIT WHICH WILL PERMIT THE CONVENTION TO RESPOND TO POPULAR WILL", I.E., AND AGREEMENT ON THE THIRD MEMBER OF THE NEW DNL.

4. MEANWHILE, EX-PRESIDENT LLERAS AND BOGOTA LEADERS OF HIS MOVEMENT HELD A SMOOTHLY-RUN RALLY IN A DOWNTOWN THEATER. LLERAS CONDEMNED THE CONVENTION, PLEDGED "REASONED SUPPORT" FOR PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND DESCRIBED HIS MOVEMENT AS OFFERING A HEALTHY ALTERNATIVE TO THE MASSES DISILLUSIONED BY AN UNWORKABLE AND ANARCHICAL PARTY.

5. COMMENT: THE ONE-MONTH BREATHING SPELL COULD GIVE THE LIBERAL PARTY TIME TO OVERCOME DIFFERENCES AND TO FIND A SUITABLE COMPROMISE CANDIDATE FOR THE DNL. THE BURBAYISTAS APPARENTLY NEED MORE ACTIVE DIRECTION FROM AMBASSADOR TURBAY, WHOSE INTERVENTIONS BY TELEPHONE FROM WASHINGTON WERE NOT SUFFICIENT TO KEEP HIS SUPPORTERS IN LINE. THE CONVENTION DEMONSTRATED THE FACT THAT WITH AMBASSADOR TURBAY OUT OF THE COUNTRY, THE LIBERAL PARTY IS HARDLY HIS MACHINE AS CHARGED SO OFTEN AND FORCEFULLY BY LLERAS.

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